

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND PATRONAGE POLITICS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2025 PESAWARAN REGIONAL ELECTION RE-VOTE

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Abstract

The re-voting process (Pemungutan Suara Ulang/PSU) in regional elections is often understood as a consequence of administrative violations or electoral disputes. Such an approach, however, tends to be normative and does not fully explain the political dynamics underlying the process. This study examines the 2025 Pesawaran regional election re-vote as a manifestation of an electoral integrity crisis rooted in local patronage structures and elite power relations. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on official documents and voter-participation data to examine the interaction between vote buying, bureaucratic mobilization, and institutional intervention. Drawing on Pippa Norris's concept of electoral integrity and the clientelism literature of Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati, the study finds that the Pesawaran re-vote emerged from the accumulation of alleged abuse of state resources and the use of patron-client networks in electoral competition. The intervention of the Constitutional Court functioned as a corrective mechanism, while also revealing weaknesses in the capacity of local political institutions to safeguard electoral integrity. The re-vote has implications for democratic legitimacy, social polarization, and public trust in electoral institutions. Theoretically, the study demonstrates that re-voting in Indonesian local democracy cannot be understood solely as a matter of legality, but also as a manifestation of patronage and local oligarchic structures that penetrate electoral institutions.

Keywords: Electoral Integrity, Clientelism, Patronage Politics, Local Democracy, Regional Elections.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy provides an arena in which citizens legitimately compete to become leaders who can advocate shared values (Wiratmaja, 2018). Yet electoral democracy currently faces a range of problems, including disputes over regional elections. Such disputes have emerged

alongside increasing political competition and participation at the local level and have become more frequent in relation to fraud, vote manipulation, and procedural violations (Arifin, 2024).

The growing number of regional election disputes, marked by fraud, vote manipulation, and procedural violations, has directly contributed to the emergence of re-voting (PSU) as an indicator of instability in local democracy. Such instability is reflected in the failure of electoral processes to guarantee electoral integrity, the escalation of electoral conflict, procedural violations, and the inability of local democratic systems to produce stable political legitimacy. In this sense, re-voting, although designed as a corrective mechanism, may also signal dysfunction within local democracy itself (Yanti et al., 2025).

This dynamic is reflected in the 2025 re-voting process in Pesawaran Regency. According to Junaidi (as cited in Sari et al., 2020), the dispute initially arose from a lawsuit filed by candidate pair number 2 concerning alleged administrative violations in the candidacy and verification stages conducted by the Pesawaran Regency General Elections Commission (KPU). Candidate pair number 1 subsequently alleged that candidate pair number 2 had committed electoral violations, including using recess funds for campaigning and receiving support from local figures and fellow party members who campaigned for them in the Pesawaran regional election (Sari et al., 2026).

Perkasa (2023), in their study entitled “Social Conflict and Identity Politics as a Defect of Indonesian Democracy: The 2017 Jakarta Regional Election Case,” demonstrate how social conflict, societal polarization, and large-scale mass mobilization can disrupt the quality of local democracy. A study of regional election disputes by Triadi and Sidabutar (2024), entitled “Settlement of the 2020 Sabu Raijua Regional Election Dispute in East Nusa Tenggara by the Constitutional Court,” explains that the dispute emerged after it was established that the elected regent candidate, Orient Patriot Riwu Kore, held dual Indonesian–American citizenship. Meanwhile, Rahayu et al. (2025), in “Power Manipulation in the 2024 Serang Regional Election: A Juridical Analysis of Organized Electoral Violations,” identify allegations of structured, systematic, and massive (TSM) electoral violations in the dispute.

Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on the Pesawaran regional election re-vote not merely as a procedural violation, but as an expression of political patronage and an institutional crisis in the administration of local democracy. It therefore offers a perspective that moves beyond a formal legal approach toward a structural analysis of power and democratic institutions. Based on this distinction in focus and approach, the study asks how patronage politics and local power relations contributed to the re-voting process in Pesawaran Regency and what implications the re-vote had for the legitimacy of local democracy.

The re-vote in Pesawaran Regency should not be understood merely as a consequence of administrative violations, but also as a reflection of local patronage structures that penetrate electoral institutions and generate an electoral integrity crisis. From the perspective of Pippa Norris’s electoral integrity framework, the phenomenon illustrates electoral malpractice and the abuse of state resources in electoral processes. At the same time, it can be explained through the perspectives of clientelism and patronage developed in Indonesian studies by Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati, which position vote buying as an informal institution, patron–

client relations as a feature of regional elections, and material distribution as a structural strategy for electoral victory.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach that views the object of study as dynamic, constructed through thought and interpretation, and holistic because its various aspects form an interconnected whole (Nasution, 2023). A case study approach was selected because it is appropriate for examining a phenomenon comprehensively within its real-world context. The approach is intended to answer questions of how and why a phenomenon occurs while revealing the details, meanings, and distinctive characteristics of the case under investigation (Nasution, 2023). The study also uses a literature review as a data-collection technique to strengthen the theoretical foundation and enrich the analysis of empirical findings. The data consist of official Constitutional Court decisions, which are read and analyzed as political phenomena, as well as scholarly articles discussing political dynamics in Pesawaran in 2025. All data are analyzed qualitatively through reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify relevant patterns, relationships, and meanings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

PATRONAGE POLITICS IN THE PESAWARAN REGIONAL ELECTION CONTESTATION

The Pesawaran regional election case began with the election results announced by the Pesawaran General Elections Commission (KPU), which showed that candidate pair number 1, Hi. Aries Sandi Darma Putra and Supriyanto, won the election. Candidate pair number 2, Hj. Nanda Indira Bastian and Antonius Muhammad Ali, challenged the result and subsequently filed a petition with the Constitutional Court on 9 December 2024 under case number 20/PHPU.BUP-XXIII/2025 (Sari et al., 2026).

Constitutional Court Decision No. 20/PHPU.BUP-XXIII/2025 records KPU Pesawaran Decision No. 1635 of 2024, under which candidate pair number 1, Hi. Aries Sandi Darma Putra and Supriyanto, received 143,391 votes, while the applicants received 97,625 votes, out of 241,016 valid votes, producing a margin of 45,766 votes. Normatively, the margin exceeded the 1.5 percent threshold stipulated in Article 158 of Law No. 10 of 2016, meaning that the petition did not meet the formal requirements on a purely mathematical basis. The applicants, however, argued that the Constitutional Court was not limited to assessing the numerical margin and could also examine structured, systematic, and massive (TSM) violations that affected the election result.

The applicants argued that candidate pair number 1 should not have satisfied the nomination requirements because they allegedly did not possess a valid senior high school or equivalent diploma and still had outstanding obligations to the state based on findings by the Audit Board of Indonesia (BPK) during the candidate's previous tenure as regent. According to the applicants, the KPU Pesawaran's acceptance of the nomination constituted a procedural defect and violated statutory provisions, thereby directly affecting the election result.

On that basis, the applicants asked the Court to suspend application of the threshold provision in Article 158 of Law No. 10 of 2016, recognize their legal standing, annul the decision establishing the election result, and disqualify candidate pair number 1. Thus, the core of the petition was not merely the vote margin, but the validity of the nomination, which the applicants considered decisive to the legitimacy of the 2024 Pesawaran Regent and Deputy Regent Election (MKRI, 2025a).

The Pesawaran election dispute cannot be separated from the broader context of electoral politics in Indonesia, which is characterized by exchange relationships and the distribution of resources. Although the Constitutional Court petition focused on the legality of the nomination and alleged administrative violations, the intensity of the competition and the substantial vote margin can theoretically be read as part of an electoral structure that encourages candidates to employ patronage instruments to secure support. The Pesawaran election illustrates how local electoral democracy operates under the shadow of oligarchic structures, in which formal electoral mechanisms interact with informal power structures that constrain equal political competition. The legitimacy of an election result is therefore shaped not only by vote totals but also by unequal power relations and control over resources that influence the political behavior of voters and local actors.

Accordingly, although the dispute before the Constitutional Court centered on the formal-legal aspects of nomination eligibility and the vote-margin threshold, the Pesawaran case can also be understood theoretically as part of an electoral democratic structure shaped by entrenched patronage and clientelism. Local political competition takes place not only within a legal framework but also according to the logic of a vote market and informally institutionalized patron–client networks. This suggests that the legitimacy of an election result is influenced not only by vote totals but also by the power relations and resource distribution operating behind the electoral process.

Following the decision, the Constitutional Court found significant violations in the verification of the nomination requirements conducted by the Pesawaran KPU concerning candidate pair number 1. The violations primarily concerned the validity of the candidate's educational documents and financial status, which were considered inconsistent with applicable statutory requirements. On this basis, candidate pair number 1 was disqualified. The Court then instructed the Pesawaran KPU to conduct an immediate re-vote at all polling stations (TPS) in the regency (Sari et al., 2026).

Candidate pair number 1 subsequently filed a separate petition alleging TSM violations by candidate pair number 2 during the electoral process. The petition alleged vote inflation at various polling stations and the misuse of government resources, including funds allocated to members of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and recess funds of the Lampung Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) to support one candidate pair. The allegations were addressed in Constitutional Court Decision No. 325/PHPU.BUP-XXIII/2025 (MKRI, 2025b).

The decision referred to an online news report published by [Tribunlampung.co.id](https://tribunlampung.co.id) on 7 May 2025 concerning the distribution of agricultural equipment and machinery (alsintan) on Tuesday, 6 May 2025, in Purworejo Village, Negeri Katon District, Pesawaran Regency. The

event was attended by representatives of four farmer groups (Gapoktan): Arjuna Jaya (Purworejo Village), Cinta Karya (Lumbir Rejo Village), Sumber Kehidupan (Bangun Sari Village), and Sido Muncul (Halangan Ratu Village). Each group received a six-inch water pump and ten hand sprayers. According to the report, the assistance was handed over by Nanda Indira.

The decision stated that the agricultural equipment distributed was part of a government program under the Constituency Development Program Proposal (UP2DP), commonly known as constituency or aspirational funds, originating from a member of the Indonesian MPR from the Gerindra Party. Media coverage also displayed a billboard reading “Aspirasi Ahmad Muzani Ketua MPR RI” alongside the Gerindra Party logo. The decision noted that there was no direct institutional connection between Ahmad Muzani, a Gerindra MPR member, and Nanda Indira, the number 02 candidate from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI Perjuangan). The alleged conduct was therefore presented as a possible misuse of state resources under Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections.

The decision also contained the testimony of Witness A, who stated that on 6 May 2025 at approximately 2:30 p.m. local time, an event was held at Darul Qutni’s house in Kubu Batu Village, Way Khilau District, and attended by local residents. The witness saw Ely, a member of the Lampung Provincial DPRD from the Gerindra Party, ask several residents to come forward. Seven people were selected, including Mahiruddin (neighborhood head), Rusmala Juwita (village treasurer), and five other residents. In front of the community, Ely openly asked, “Who are you voting for, which number?”, to which they responded, “Nanda, number 2.” Ely then handed envelopes containing money to them beside a banner for candidate pair number 02. The event was described as a recess activity of a Lampung Provincial DPRD member. The distribution of envelopes was alleged to constitute political direction toward candidate pair 02 even though the recess activity was funded by the state budget. In its decision, the Constitutional Court declared the applicant’s petition inadmissible. The Court therefore did not proceed to examine the merits because the applicant was deemed not to meet the formal requirements for bringing an election-result dispute.

The allegations examined in Decision No. 325/PHPU.BUP-XXIII/2025 demonstrate that the claimed electoral violations were framed as TSM violations, particularly alleged misuse of state resources and distribution of money to voters. From a political perspective, these allegations can be interpreted not merely as isolated incidents but as part of the logic of patronage and clientelism that has become institutionalized in Indonesian electoral politics.

The alleged distribution of envelopes during a Lampung DPRD recess activity, as described by the witness, reflects a vote-buying pattern in which cash was accompanied by reinforcement of a political preference (“Who are you voting for, which number?”). This corresponds to the market logic described by Aspinall, whereby candidates are driven to “secure” votes through material incentives because of social expectations and competitive pressures. In this context, money functions as a mechanism for binding political loyalty that is fragile and transactional.

The agricultural equipment allegedly sourced from legislative members' aspirational funds and subsequently claimed or associated with a particular candidate reflects the forms of club goods or pork-barrel projects, namely the distribution of public resources to particular groups to generate collective support. In the typology proposed by Muhtadi (2013) and Aspinall and Sukmajati (2015), such practices fall within the use of public projects or assistance with an electoral dimension. The practice illustrates the blurred boundary between public policy and campaign strategy. Formally, agricultural assistance is part of a legitimate agricultural development program funded through the state budget. However, when its distribution is politicized through symbolism, personal claims, or narratives that the assistance is a candidate's "contribution," public resources become personalized. The state as an impersonal institution is reduced to an extension of particular political actors.

From a clientelist perspective, the relationship is personalistic, hierarchical, and based on reciprocity (Hicken, 2011; Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015). Patrons—whether candidates or party elites—have access to state resources, while clients, including voters or farmer groups, occupy a position of dependence on the distribution of benefits. Such relationships are not necessarily one-off transactions; they may be repeated and institutionalized through social networks, recess activities, and aspirational programs. The alleged practice therefore reflects a patron–client relationship in which political support is exchanged for material benefits.

Legally, however, the Constitutional Court did not proceed to examine the substance of these allegations. Thus, although the alleged practices can theoretically be categorized as vote buying and patronage based on state resources, the Court did not undertake further evidentiary examination because of the applicant's lack of legal standing. This creates a tension between normative-empirical analysis in political science and the procedural approach of electoral law. From a theoretical standpoint, the allegations display strong characteristics of electoral patronage and clientelism. Legally, however, the case ended at the formal stage rather than through substantive adjudication of the alleged misuse of state resources.

The decision also contained allegations concerning the involvement of village officials and election administrators in directing citizens to vote for candidate pair number 02. These allegations were based on witness statements submitted as evidence. Witness B stated that on 24 May 2025 at approximately 10:30 a.m. at a polling station in Sukaraja 1 Village, Gedong Tataan District, a village official named Ali Ansori influenced residents to vote for candidate pair 02 by distributing envelopes. Witness C described a similar incident on 22 May 2025 in Gunung Rejo, Padang Cermin District, where RT 02 head Suyanto allegedly directed voters toward candidate pair 02 by distributing envelopes.

Similar testimony was provided by Witnesses D, F, G, H, and I. They stated that several neighborhood heads and Civil Protection (Linmas) members visited residents' homes in several villages and distributed envelopes containing Rp50,000 with the purpose of directing voters toward candidate pair 02. Witness E further stated that a polling-station working committee (KPPS) member collected information about the witness and the witness's family, then provided Rp300,000 to be distributed among ten family members in exchange for voting for candidate pair 02, together with a promised additional Rp500,000 that was ultimately not paid.

In addition to alleged vote direction through money distribution, the applicant alleged that some voters—believed to support candidate pair 01—were denied their right to vote. According to Witnesses J through O, several residents in different villages did not receive voting invitations and were not listed on the Permanent Voters List (DPT), even though they had been registered on the DPT in the previous regional election. When the witnesses went to polling stations with electronic identity cards on election day, they were still not permitted to vote by election administrators, despite intending to vote for candidate pair 01.

Based on the witness statements and evidence as a whole, the applicant alleged that the number 02 regent candidate was involved in mobilizing village officials and election administrators to secure victory for candidate pair 02. This allegation was linked to a closed meeting of all village heads across Pesawaran Regency at the regent's official residence, which was said to have included instructions to support candidate pair 02. The pattern was considered to demonstrate a structured and massive movement, both through the distribution of money by village officials and through actions by election administrators that allegedly prevented certain voters from exercising their voting rights.

The allegations concerning the involvement of village officials and election administrators in directing voters toward candidate pair 02 display characteristics associated with vote buying and electoral clientelism. The distribution of envelopes containing Rp50,000 to Rp300,000, as described by the witnesses, can be categorized analytically as vote buying. Vote buying operates through systematic social networks, including neighborhood heads, village officials, Linmas members, and KPPS personnel who function as political brokers. In this case, local actors served as intermediaries who distributed money while also seeking to secure a commitment to vote ("Vote for number 02").

The involvement of neighborhood heads, village officials, and even KPPS members indicates a hierarchical and personalistic form of clientelism. According to Aspinall and Sukmajati (2015) and Allen Hicken (2011), clientelist relationships have three main characteristics: reciprocal exchange, unequal or hierarchical relationships, and continuity. Here, the patron—whether a candidate or political elite—uses the hierarchical social structure of the village to reach clients, namely voters. Neighborhood heads and village officials possess substantial social authority, which can weaken voters' bargaining position. The envelope is therefore not merely an economic incentive but also a symbol of a top-down power relationship.

The alleged practice can also be classified within the political patronage typology described by Aspinall and Berenschot (2019). Cash distribution constitutes vote buying, while mobilization through village structures and election administrators indicates the misuse of institutional access for electoral purposes. When village officials or KPPS members become involved, patronage is no longer purely private but overlaps with state institutions. At this point, clientelism becomes intertwined with the use of institutional authority or office to mobilize political support.

The allegation that voters believed to support candidate pair 01 were denied their voting rights reveals another dimension of clientelism: control over political access. In clientelist

theory, patrons do not only provide benefits to clients; they may also obstruct or exclude those perceived as disloyal. Such conduct represents a strategy of political exclusion within unequal electoral competition.

Overall, the allegations reveal a structured and layered pattern. From a theoretical perspective, this is consistent with the argument that patronage and clientelism in Indonesia are not merely sporadic phenomena but can become institutionalized through local social networks. Nevertheless, in the domain of electoral law, establishing such practices remains subject to strict evidentiary standards, regardless of the strength of clientelist patterns identified through political analysis.

From the perspective of local oligarchy, these practices illustrate how political elites may use village social structures and institutions to consolidate support through the distribution of assistance, aspirational funds, and cash, producing hierarchical and transactional power relations. Access to public budgets and institutional positions becomes an important instrument for maintaining dominance, while voters may become relatively dependent on the distribution of material benefits. The alleged obstruction of voting rights for particular groups also indicates potential control over political access as part of a strategy for maintaining power. Although the Constitutional Court legally terminated the examination at the formal stage, the case illustrates, from a political perspective, how local electoral democracy may remain strongly shaped by oligarchic configurations operating through patronage, clientelism, and control over state institutions.

RE-VOTING AS A SYMPTOM OF AN ELECTORAL INTEGRITY CRISIS

The Pesawaran regional election case reveals a serious problem of weak administrative control in the conduct of elections. Electoral integrity emphasizes that free and fair elections should not be assessed only on election day, but across the entire electoral cycle, including candidate verification, oversight of state-resource use, and protection of citizens' voting rights. In this case, two major indications of administrative failure emerged: weak verification of candidate eligibility and ineffective oversight of alleged misuse of state resources and procedural violations at the village and polling-station levels.

First, in the initial case that resulted in the disqualification of a candidate, the Constitutional Court found significant violations in the administrative verification of candidacy by the local KPU. This indicates that the administrative control function, which should ensure that only legally qualified candidates participate in the contest, did not operate optimally. From Norris's perspective, manipulation or failure at the nomination stage constitutes electoral malpractice because it undermines equal competition. When administrative screening is not conducted carefully and independently, the legitimacy of the electoral process is threatened from the outset.

Second, in the subsequent case, allegations concerned the distribution of assistance, the use of recess funds, and the involvement of village officials and election administrators in directing political choices. This indicates weaknesses in administrative oversight of the abuse

of state resources. Norris emphasizes that the misuse of state resources is a major form of electoral integrity violation because it creates unequal competition. The failure of oversight bodies and election administrators to prevent or sanction such practices suggests that administrative controls were insufficient to protect the neutrality of public institutions.

Third, the alleged denial of voting rights to several citizens who presented electronic identity cards also indicates potential maladministration in voter-list management and the provision of voting services. Within electoral integrity theory, protection of voting rights is a fundamental element of free and fair elections. When eligible citizens cannot exercise their right to vote because of administrative negligence or discriminatory action, political representation is distorted. Such administrative failures need not always be intentional; they may also result from limited technical capacity, insufficient training, or weak bureaucratic accountability. Whatever the cause, the consequence is a decline in electoral integrity.

The Constitutional Court's termination of the case illustrates a tension between a procedural legal approach and a substantive approach to electoral integrity. Formally, the legal-standing requirement was not satisfied. From an electoral integrity perspective, however, the more fundamental question is whether administrative mechanisms were sufficiently effective to prevent and address violations from the outset. If alleged violations are only brought to light after results are announced and are not addressed during administrative oversight, this reflects weaknesses in the internal control system of electoral governance. Through Norris's framework, the Pesawaran case can therefore be understood as an example of how failures of administrative control can erode electoral integrity.

The Pesawaran regional election also indicates serious concerns about the neutrality of public institutions and election administrators. In Norris's (2014) theory, elections with integrity require independent and impartial institutions so that all contestants compete on equal terms. When public institutions show bias or participate in practices that benefit one candidate, the fundamental principle of free and fair elections is compromised.

Allegations concerning the involvement of village officials, neighborhood heads, Linmas members, and even KPPS personnel in directing political choices through money distribution indicate potential erosion of institutional neutrality at the local level. Village officials and election administrators are part of the state structure and are expected to maintain impartiality. If they become involved in political mobilization, public institutions no longer function solely as administrators of a fair democratic process but may become instruments of particular electoral interests. From Norris's perspective, this represents institutional electoral malpractice because it involves actors exercising administrative authority.

Moreover, alleged misuse of recess funds and agricultural equipment sourced from state budgets points toward abuse of state resources. Norris emphasizes that a major threat to electoral integrity occurs when public officials or actors with access to state resources use them for campaign interests. Such non-neutrality creates structural inequality among candidates because one side gains an advantage from access to state facilities that should serve the public generally rather than electoral interests.

The alleged denial of voting rights to particular citizens can also be interpreted as administrative bias. If discrimination in the provision of voting services based on assumed political preferences were established, election administrators would no longer function solely as guarantors of citizens' constitutional rights but would become actors capable of influencing political outcomes. Under electoral integrity theory, such conditions undermine the legitimacy of election results because universal suffrage and political equality are compromised. Thus, in terms of institutional neutrality, the Pesawaran case indicates a potential structural problem in which state officials and election administrators may not be fully insulated from local political interests.

The Pesawaran election illustrates how a sequence of disputes, candidate disqualification, alleged misuse of state resources, and allegations of official involvement can directly affect public perceptions of the validity of election results. Norris (2014) argues that electoral integrity concerns not only procedural compliance but also citizens' perceptions that the process is fair, impartial, and competitive. When electoral stages are marked by administrative controversy and alleged fraud, public trust in political institutions may erode.

The disqualification of a candidate pair after the initial result had been established, although based on findings of administrative violations, may create a perception that the initial verification process was not sufficiently professional or transparent. This creates political uncertainty and raises questions about the capacity and independence of election administrators. From a legitimacy perspective, changing an election result through a judicial decision is constitutionally legitimate, but it may nevertheless contribute to polarization if the public interprets it as a consequence of earlier administrative failures.

Furthermore, in the subsequent case involving allegations of patronage, money distribution, and misuse of state resources, the fact that the Constitutional Court did not examine the merits does not necessarily end the public perception of the issue at the formal stage. Within electoral integrity theory, legitimacy is determined not only by compliance with legal requirements but also by citizens' belief that competition was equal and not manipulated. When widespread narratives of institutional non-neutrality or abuse of state resources emerge, confidence in the final result may weaken even when the result is legally valid.

The decline in legitimacy has implications for the quality of political representation. If some citizens believe that an election result was shaped by unfair practices or failures of administrative oversight, the relationship between citizens as principals and elected officials as agents becomes more fragile. In settings where institutional capacity remains limited, such conditions may deepen social polarization, reduce future political participation, and increase reliance on legal dispute resolution rather than political consensus. From the perspective of electoral integrity, the Pesawaran case therefore illustrates how the combination of administrative failure, alleged institutional non-neutrality, and repeated disputes may undermine the legitimacy of local democracy.

From the perspective of institutional political dynamics, the role of the Constitutional Court in the Pesawaran case reveals an ambivalent position between constitutional guardian and actor operating within a weak political-institutional ecosystem. On the one hand, the Court

performed a corrective function by identifying serious administrative violations in candidate verification and ordering a re-vote, demonstrating the capacity of judicial institutions to correct failures in electoral administration. On the other hand, in the subsequent case, the Court ended the examination at the formal stage because the applicant did not satisfy the legal requirements to bring the election dispute, leaving the alleged misuse of state resources substantively unexamined. Procedurally, this was consistent with the positive legal framework, but institutionally it raises questions about the extent to which the regulatory design can address structural problems of electoral integrity.

This dynamic illustrates how local political institutions operate within hierarchical and transactional power networks. Weak political institutions do not necessarily mean the absence of rules; rather, they may indicate an inability of rules to withstand the penetration of elite interests with access to state resources. In this context, the Constitutional Court becomes a final arena for resolving elite conflict, rather than merely a forum for protecting citizens' constitutional rights. Repeated disputes that reach the Court suggest that local political competition is not fully resolved through institutional mechanisms at lower levels but instead depends on judicial intervention at the national level.

Thus, the case can be read as a reflection of procedural democracy that continues to rely on judicial institutions to correct weaknesses in other political institutions. The Constitutional Court acts as a counterweight when administrative failures occur, but its intervention is also constrained by normative limits. This suggests that the central problem lies not solely in the Court's decisions, but in the weakness of local political institutions that are not yet fully autonomous, professional, and resilient to patronage networks. In such a configuration, law becomes a further arena of political contestation, while strengthening democratic integrity remains dependent on deeper institutional reform.

The Pesawaran case can also be analyzed as a dynamic that may deepen social polarization at the local level. Repeated disputes, candidate disqualification, re-voting, and allegations of structured violations and misuse of state resources create a narrative of competition that is no longer purely electoral but increasingly connected to group identity and political loyalty. When each side believes that the other has gained an unfair advantage, competition becomes a conflict over legitimacy. In such circumstances, citizens differ not only in their political choices but also in their perceptions of the truth and fairness of the process. Polarization can therefore extend beyond elites into the social bases of support at the village level.

Another consequence is growing distrust toward election administrators and political institutions. Within the electoral integrity framework, public trust is a foundation of democratic legitimacy. When perceptions emerge that the KPU failed in candidate verification, oversight of alleged misuse of state resources was ineffective, or disputes ended on formal grounds without substantive examination, the public may perceive institutions as insufficiently independent or competent. Even where a decision is legally sound, perceptions of procedural unfairness can still erode trust. Such distrust is consequential because, over time, it may reduce political participation, increase apathy, or even trigger protest mobilization rooted in distrust of electoral outcomes.

The implications for strengthening electoral integrity are significant. First, administrative controls should be strengthened from the earliest stages, particularly in candidate verification and oversight of official neutrality, to prevent disputes from recurring at the final stages. Second, oversight mechanisms concerning the use of state resources should be clarified and tightened, with effective coordination among Bawaslu, law-enforcement agencies, and audit institutions so that abuse of state resources can be prevented before it becomes a major political issue. Third, transparency and public communication by election administrators should be strengthened so that administrative decisions gain social legitimacy as well as legal legitimacy. Overall, the case demonstrates that electoral integrity is not merely a matter of compliance with rules, but also of institutional capacity to maintain public trust. Without administrative reform and stronger institutional neutrality, social polarization and distrust may become a recurring cycle in local political contests.

CONCLUSION

The Pesawaran regional election re-vote should not be understood solely as a procedural correction of administrative defects, but as the product of a complex interaction between patronage practices, local elite power relations, and weak political oversight mechanisms. The dynamics demonstrate that electoral competition does not take place in a neutral space; rather, it is intertwined with patron–client networks that enable resource mobilization, benefit distribution, and informal interventions in the exercise of power. In this context, the re-vote represents the manifestation of elite conflict that could not be resolved at the administrative level and ultimately moved into the judicial arena.

The intervention of the Constitutional Court functioned as a corrective mechanism to restore legality and ensure compliance with formal rules. However, judicial intervention largely addressed the surface of the problem—correcting an election result or procedure deemed defective—without directly dismantling the structural roots of patronage that sustain the misuse of resources and network-based political mobilization. As long as patron–client relations remain a foundation of local power distribution, the potential reproduction of electoral malpractice remains open in future contests.

Therefore, electoral reform should not focus solely on strengthening administrative procedures, such as improving verification or technical oversight. It must also address the local political structures that enable the concentration of power, voters’ socioeconomic dependence, and the blurring of boundaries between state resources and electoral interests. Without structural transformation, re-voting risks becoming a short-term solution that alleviates symptoms without addressing the underlying problems of local democratic governance.

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